

Reprinted from NY Times, Editorial, July 7, 2008

Letters

Failures in the Fight Against Drugs

To the Editor:

"Not Winning the War on Drugs," your July 2 editorial about the importance of treating drug addicts and recognizing that drug abuse is a public health problem and not just a criminal problem, is on the mark.

The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University has done analyses of the nation's prison population that show that 80 percent of felony inmates and juvenile arrestees either committed their crime while high on alcohol or drugs, stole money to buy drugs, have a history of drug and/or alcohol abuse and addiction, violated the alcohol or drug laws, or share some combination of those characteristics.

The reports of our analyses demonstrate that if all inmates and arrestees who need treatment received it and the success rate were only 10 percent, the cost of treatment would be recouped in a year, and thereafter the economic benefits in productivity, taxes and reduction in criminal activity would approach \$10 billion a year.

Moreover, we would experience a dramatic reduction in crime since experts estimate that an addict averages between 89 and 191 crimes a year.

Joseph A. Califano Jr.

New York, July 2, 2008

The writer is chairman and president, National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University.

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To the Editor:

It is time to recognize that the war on drugs is simply not winnable. Prohibition didn't stop people from consuming alcohol, and the war on drugs will never stop them from using drugs.

Until our policy makers come to grips with that reality, we will

continue to suffer from a drug policy that creates a vicious black market economy and wastes billions of dollars on futile interdiction efforts.

Jerry Wallingford

San Diego, July 2, 2008

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To the Editor:

Your editorial, while accurate, misses the overarching point. Prohibition failed in the past, and it is not working now. The scarce tax dollars currently being wasted by the White House on quixotic interdiction adventures pale in comparison to the decades of tax revenues we haven't been collecting because of prohibition.

These funds could help pay for honest drug education, free drug treatment on demand and better health care - all things we need right now.

Instead of flawed government hype, we need policy alternatives to the drug war that uphold the sovereignty of individuals over their minds and bodies and are grounded in science, compassion, health and human rights.

Anthony Papa

Communications Specialist

Drug Policy Alliance

New York, July 2, 2008

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To the Editor:

Your editorial includes powerful information on the futility of the United States war on drugs but then makes the fatuous recommendation that the next administration should provide funds to reform Mexico's judicial system - a process that is already under way.

Mexico faces a killing spree affecting thousands of innocent people that

is financed by American money going to the drug cartels that fight for dominance of the lucrative United States market for illegal drugs. The earnings from this trade amount to at least \$15 billion a year - enough to buy arms to outgun the Mexican police and bribe underpaid security officials.

We can't buy our way out of this culpability with a few hundred million dollars of aid and irrelevant advice. The remedies lie on our side of the border. We need to curb demand by treating our addicts and by decriminalizing drug use, reduce the street price of drugs and thus the gains of the drug lords.

Sidney Weintraub

Washington, July 2, 2008

The writer is an economist at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

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To the Editor:

Your editorial made an important point about the need for more effort to reduce the demand for drugs.

The United States should devote more resources to preventing and treating substance abuse and dependence. But these resources should be allocated based on need.

Alcohol is the drug of choice for the overwhelming majority of people suffering from a substance use disorder. According to the 2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, nearly 16 million Americans were dependent on or abusing alcohol. That's five times greater than the number of people who were dependent on or abusing illicit drugs and almost 15 times greater than the number of people dependent on or abusing cocaine.

Rather than spend billions of dollars on foreign intrigues and high-profile cocaine seizures, the next administration should do more to address the greatest source of drug-related problems in the United States: alcohol.

David R. Anderson

Washington, July 3, 2008

The writer is communications director and senior research scientist in the department of health policy, George Washington University Medical Center.